

# FROM RAGS TO RICHES

100 YEARS OF AMERICAN SONG

---

NOTES & LYRICS



# NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

BY STEVEN BLIER

As the millennium approached, the world held its breath. There was talk of a massive computer glitch at 12: 01 AM on New Year's Day 2000, the Y2K debacle that many feared could send every digital system into chaos. I decided to let the tech folks worry about all of that. I was busy with my own way of greeting the new century: a NYFOS program called *From Rags to Riches*, a compendium of American songs celebrating the century we were about to leave behind.

I had good reason to celebrate. The mezzo-soprano Stephanie Blythe was going to sing in our concert. We had met five years earlier at Wolf Trap, and her career was now skyrocketing. Her voice was—and remains—a natural wonder, an uncanny mix of power and flexibility. I asked her whom she would like as a partner, since all NYFOS concerts are ensemble efforts. She chose the tenor William Burden, who was miraculously available. His sweet sound and patrician phrasing were the perfect foil for Stephanie's volcanic energy, and the two of them were able to navigate all the stylistic zigzags of twentieth century American song.

The performance took place on March 23, 2000, and this recording commemorates that magical night at the Kaye Playhouse at Hunter College. It is a fitting début release for NYFOS Records.

The playlist of *Rags to Riches* is like a social history of twentieth century America—how we lived and how we loved. But a hundred years of song inevitably becomes a musical history as well. Throughout the century, the rhythms and harmonies of Black musicians—spirituals, blues, gospel and jazz—have found their way into all of our music. They permeate our Broadway songs, concert pieces, and operas, and they have provided a bridge to unite audiences and performers of all races.

This is why it seemed fitting to start the show with a couple of the century's earliest jazz songs. If Scott Joplin (1868-1917) did not single-handedly invent ragtime, he certainly became its best-known exponent in our country. After the early years of the century, his rags went dormant for decades until pianist Joshua Rikfin brought them back with a wildly successful series of recordings in the late 1960's. Soon after, the soundtrack to *The Sting* gave Scott Joplin a mass audience he could never have dreamed of. But back in the day, a few of his most popular rags got re-purposed as songs. The lyricist Joe Snider turned the 1910 "Pineapple Rag" into a hymn to ragtime itself.

As Black people sought greater entrée into society, Black composers looked for ways to find an audience outside the confines of their own community. One of them, Will Marion Cook (1869-1944), made theater history on February 18, 1903 when *In Dahomey*, the first full-length Broadway musical comedy written, produced, and performed almost entirely by Black artists, had its opening night. In an era of powerful discrimination against both Blacks and theatrical performers, the success of *In Dahomey* represented a triumph of cooperation, savvy, and persistence. Between the tryout performances in Stamford, the Broadway run, and an even more successful production in London, the musical garnered over 1,100 performances between 1902 and 1905.

Cook, a student of Dvořák, turned his back on what he called “the American ‘darky’ ragtime limitation,” and gave Black actors a chance to perform with grace and dignity, to be funny without being self-demeaning, and to move onstage with naturalness. With insinuating grace, “My Lady Frog” tells the story of a rivalry between lovers of different colors, in this case brown and green—a subtle parable about race.

Before America had established a recognizable classical composing school of its own, our turn-of-the-century composers fell strongly under the sway of European traditions. Most musicians went abroad to study and absorb the national styles of Germany and France. Charles Griffes (1884-1920) was no exception.

A musician of great accomplishment and even greater promise, he died at the age of 35 after a mere ten years as a professional composer. In that short period he managed to explore many of the musical styles of his day: red-blooded Romanticism with echoes of Grieg and Scriabin, Impressionism à la Debussy, and Orientalism in an unpublished pantomime called *Sho-jo* and his *Five Songs of Ancient China and Japan*. After he died, his sister did her best to destroy letters and diaries that detailed his life as a gay man. But he seems to have enjoyed several significant love relationships during his time as a student in Berlin and later in Manhattan, as well as a circle of gay friends who gave him a sense of personal stability.

Griffes struggled mightily to establish himself, but just as success arrived his heart and lungs gave out. He was physically exhausted. His early death remains one of American music’s quiet tragedies. “Evening Song,” which dates from 1912, finds Griffes at the very peak of his Romantic period. Its double climax and richness of color heat this song with a magnificent intensity.

I can’t think of a more joyous way to evoke the Roaring ’20s than the music of George Gershwin (1898-1937). His 1928 song “Oh Gee! Oh Joy!,” with a collaborative lyric by Ira Gershwin and the great British comic writer P. G. Wodehouse, instantly immerses the listener in the brash optimism of the Jazz Age. The gentle grace of ragtime has given way

to the more virtuosic beat of stride piano, with its leaping left-hand accompaniment. The lyrics are almost comically cheerful (did it really take two guys to write them?) but the music explodes with sexual energy. No wonder it was the favorite song of George Gershwin's sister Frankie.

The manic ebullience of the 1920s, of course, gave way to the desperation of the Great Depression in the 1930s. We're featuring a pair of tunes by Marc Blitzstein (1905-1964) because he knew how to confront the socio-political issues of his day with skill and passion. He spoke for the disenfranchised: the poor, the oppressed, workers, immigrants, and all the people struggling to make ends meet in an intransigent world.

His first great triumph came in 1936 with the premiere of *The Cradle Will Rock*. The idea for the play sprang from the song "Nickel Under the Foot," which Blitzstein had written as part of a sketch in the early 1930s. When he played it for Brecht at a party in New York, the German playwright was enthusiastic. No doubt he responded to its politics and to its unmistakably Kurt Weill-ish ambience. Brecht suggested that Blitzstein build an entire play around the song. He could enlarge the story of the prostitute who sings the song, to speak to "all kinds of prostitution—the press, the church, the courts, the arts, the whole system." Blitzstein followed Brecht's advice to the letter, and the resulting musical made theater history.

Even political activists get overwhelmed and exhausted. In 1935 many people were longing to shut the door on the impending disasters in Germany and Spain. That year Blitzstein wrote "Stay in My Arms" for use in a revue sketch that never materialized. It was a love-song to his wife Eva, whose emotional and physical health were failing. She died just a few months later of anorexia, a little-understood disorder at the time. The song has the usual A-A-B-A structure of most American popular songs, but it is vocally and harmonically far more expansive than most of Blitzstein's writing. During the bridge of the refrain, the complex, anguished chords remind you that Blitzstein was a student of Arnold Schoenberg.

"Hit the Road" is the perfect answer to "Stay in My Arms." It's the handiwork of American legend Eubie Blake (1883-1983), who had his first big hit, "I'm Just Wild About Harry," in 1921, ten years after he'd begun composing. He filled decade after decade with his music, bringing an irresistible verve to the evolving rhythm of jazz. He officially retired in 1946, but the ragtime revival of the 1960s made him a superstar again, with recordings, concert engagements, and frequent appearances on national television. "Hit the Road," written in 1940 to a lyric by the under-appreciated Andy Razaf (1885-1973), blends stride piano with the boogie-woogie of the big band era.

The middle years of the century were a Golden Age for American popular song, but we



were also consolidating our contribution to the art song repertoire. This was due in no small part to Samuel Barber, whose long career as a songwriter started in his teens when his earliest compositions were premiered in recitals by his aunt, the renowned Metropolitan Opera contralto (and Caruso's co-star) Louise Homer. He was never short of illustrious muses. During his studies at the Curtis Institute of Music he wrote for soprano Rose Bampton, and in the 50s and 60s Eleanor Steber and Leontyne Price premiered his songs and operatic heroines.

Barber's gift for lyricism had another important source: he himself was blessed with a beautiful voice (extremely unusual among composers), studied singing in Vienna, and briefly flirted with a vocal career. He wrote "Nocturne" in 1940 to a poem by his friend Frederic Prokosch. Although Barber had some misgivings about the poem, he found that his music flowed from it so inevitably that he overlooked his qualms. The uncertain sense of tonality (just try finding the correct note for the vocal entrance after Barber's deceptive introduction) and increasingly turbulent mood paint a picture of two lovers in troubled times. The soaring climax is not the triumphant apotheosis of Griffes' "Evening Song", but a desperate search for reassurance in a hostile world. Barber's sublimely neurotic "Nocturne" finally brought American art song to the psychiatrist's couch.

While American composers once flocked to Germany to study, the tables turned in the late 1930s. European artists, fleeing Hitler, were coming to these shores to survive and, with luck, find work. There was a large emigré colony in Hollywood, where composers like Arnold Schoenberg rubbed shoulders with filmmakers like Billy Wilder and Ernst Lubitsch. Kurt Weill (1900-1950), of course, settled in New York, where he continued his interrupted career with a series of Broadway musicals. He never lost his German accent when he spoke, but he quickly learned to write music in the American vernacular language.

He always looked for socially relevant material and the finest writers, as he had in his Berlin years. His 1949 *Lost in the Stars* had both. This "musical tragedy" about apartheid in South Africa, written in collaboration with Maxwell Anderson, was a project especially close to Weill's heart. The ballad "Thousands of Miles" is sung towards the beginning of the show, as a father affirms his faith that he can find his long-lost son. The pentatonic melody, which is scored first as a spiritual before taking on the driving rhythm of a train, undercuts the optimism of the lyrics with the haunting sadness of the blues.

We'll celebrate our arrival at mid-century with another rag, taken from the 1954 Broadway hit show *Wonderful Town* which had a score by Leonard Bernstein (1918- 1990). To enliven the second act, he wrote a quirky, off-balance duet called "Wrong Note Rag." Comically discordant rags were nothing new—James P. Johnson's 1929 novelty piece "Modernistics" also had splashes of chord clusters and chromatic harmony. But Bernstein seasons this one with hints of scat singing and swingtime—a big mixed salad of styles which roughly averages out to the time of the story, 1935.

For many people, Leonard Bernstein was America's towering, defining presence in twentieth century music. But when it comes to Broadway shows, Richard Rodgers (1902-1979) is the gold standard. His fifty-year career centered on two long partnerships, first with the inimitably cynical Lorenz Hart, and then with that "cockeyed optimist," Oscar Hammerstein II.

After Hammerstein's death, Rodgers wrote his own lyrics for his next show, *No Strings*. But he longed for a new collaborator. When Arthur Laurents proposed a musical setting of his play *The Time of the Cuckoo*, Rodgers's daughter Mary (herself a brilliant composer) put forward the idea of a partnership with Stephen Sondheim, who had been a protégé of Hammerstein. Sondheim was none too keen on serving as someone else's lyricist, having recently launched his Broadway career as a composer with the success of *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (as well as the failure of *Anyone Can Whistle*). But if that "someone else" were the legendary Richard Rodgers, he was willing to bend the rules.

The resulting show, *Do I Hear a Waltz?* (1965), never found its footing. The animosity between Sondheim and Rodgers grew, as did their essential incompatibility—the marriage of a butter knife (Rodgers) and a steak knife (Sondheim). But with talents like these there were certain to be some first-rate songs—among them, the triumphantly seductive "**Take the Moment**," first sung by matinée idol Sergio Franchi. It is a showstopper to parallel South Pacific's "Some Enchanted Evening."

While Rodgers reigned over America's mainstream culture on Broadway, jazz musicians like Thelonious Monk (1917-1982) spearheaded a cool jazz counter-culture whose influence was gathering steady force through the 50s and 60s. Monk's long road from obscurity to recognition took two decades of work, but he finally became famous enough to be featured on the cover of *Time* magazine in 1964. Monk was known for both his brilliance and his eccentricity. His pianistic style was angular, spare, almost awkward; he gravitated to unusual harmonies, choppy melodies, and a use of musical spacing that could be eloquent or humorous. "**Round Midnight**" is probably his most famous ballad. It was originally an instrumental piece, but Monk's publishers decided to exploit its long-lined melody by adding a fine set of lyrics by Bernie Hanighen, and make it into a song.

All of us who lived through the 1960s were deeply shaken by its string of political assassinations, as we watched the Kennedy brothers, Medgar Evers, Martin Luther King, and Malcolm X get slain in quick succession. Stephen Sondheim became fascinated with the long history of presidential shootings in America and wrote a musical in 1991 to dramatize it in the form of a gallows vaudeville show. Sondheim created mysterious connections between nine murderers, from John Wilkes Booth to John Hinckley. All the characters sing in a musical style appropriate to their era, expressing their utter abandonment by the promise of America, where "everyone's got a right to their dreams."

*Assassins* had the bad luck to open during the jingoistic week of the Persian Gulf War, when its message seemed unfashionably unpatriotic. It enjoyed only a short off Broadway run. But it has become a popular repertory piece for regional companies and enjoys an occasional revival in New York. “*The Ballad of Booth*” comes towards the beginning of the show, establishing many of the show’s themes in a country-style ballad.

“*Hosing the Furniture*,” the manic monologue of a suburban housewife, was written for a 1989 musical called *Sitting on the Edge of the World*, produced as a benefit evening by the American Musical Theater Festival in Philadelphia. They asked a group of young composers including Ricky Gordon, James Sellars, Michael John LaChiusa, and Jamie Bernstein, to create musical scenes for a show about the 1939 World’s Fair, which had featured a “city of the future” pavilion. Each of the artists tried to imagine how people back then might have fantasized about magical technologies that would be available in 1989. Most of the sketches focused on the hotly-discussed scientific advances projected for everyday living—homogenized milk, the dishwasher, canned meat, helpful robots and the like.

But Larson took it a step farther with “*Hosing the Furniture*,” a paean to plastics which turns into a modern-day mad-scene. Judy Kaye premiered it at the show’s single performance, under the baton of Michael Barrett.

Ultimately the musical needed a stronger central concept to pull together its disparate parts, but Larson’s contribution didn’t go unnoticed. His showstopper won him the Stephen Sondheim Award. The attendant recognition and cash gave him the much needed support to work on his next musical, the Broadway smash *Rent* which opened six years later. Tragically, on the eve of his breakthrough, Larson died of an aortic aneurysm.

It has been deeply satisfying to watch William Bolcom’s steady evolution from hip cult figure to hip cultural icon. In the process he has lost none of his irreverence, his wisdom, or his deep commitment to practically every form of musical expression. Opera, however, came last. When I first met him, he and his wife, the cabaret singer Joan Morris, seemed resistant to its broad gestures and Italianate singing style. But this began to change as Bolcom combined classical and popular singing in his monumental cantata *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1984). He followed that with the 1991 song cycle *I Will Breathe a Mountain* for Marilyn Horne. Soon after, the Chicago Lyric Opera commissioned him to write *McTeague*, and, pleased with this initial opera, they asked for another, *A View from the Bridge*, which enjoyed a triumphant premiere in 1999. It served as Bolcom’s Metropolitan Opera debut three years later.

Bolcom brings his many skills to opera—an intimate understanding of word-setting, the ability to orchestrate with enough transparency to hear and understand the singers,

stylistic variety, wit, and a command of dramatic pacing. The tenor aria in *A View from the Bridge*, known as “New York Lights,” has already become a modern classic. Bolcom’s combination of romantic abandon with the ache of the blues is the perfect musical formula for an Italian immigrant’s love song to New York City.

For so many of us, the AIDS crisis permeated the end of the twentieth century with a sense of tragedy. “It’s our World War II,” a doctor friend of mine said. AIDS claimed the lives of so many beloved friends and artists, among them the composer Chris DeBlasio (1959- 1993). As the epidemic progressed, it became a frequent subject of his musical works. Working in tandem with the late baritone Will Parker (who also lost his life to AIDS), DeBlasio wrote a song for the 1992 AIDS Quilt Songbook, “Walt Whitman in 1989.” It is set to a poem by Perry Brass which evokes Whitman’s volunteer work in hospitals during the Civil War. DeBlasio once asked Brass, “What’s the use of Art in the face of AIDS?” Together they answered the question with a song that has memorialized the crisis for the generations to come.

The CD ends with an American classic, heard in an arrangement by Broadway’s premiere orchestrator David Krane. “How Can I Keep from Singing” appears in hymnals and has become particularly associated with Quaker services. The lyrics are by an anonymous author—or, more likely, a number of writers over the course of centuries. But the melody we know today was the handiwork of the nineteenth-century Baptist minister and hymn composer Robert Lowry (1826-1899). A self-taught musician, he wrote more than 500 hymns, including “Shall We Gather at the River.”

Pete Seeger was the first to bring this song out of the church and onto the concert platform during the folk music boom of the 1960s. He toned down some of the overt religiosity of the original, and he also added a modern verse written by his friend Doris Plenn—“When tyrants tremble, sick with fear...” This was a reference to the recent McCarthy trials, where Seeger had been found guilty and was sentenced to a year in jail. Saved by a legal technicality, he never had to serve his time.

I am not naïve enough to think that song alone can protect us from tyrants, madmen, or self-serving oligarchs. But it can coalesce us into meaningful action. It can give us comfort. It can provide a respite of beauty, a reminder of our shared humanity, and support for our most generous impulses. The vibration of song is a ripple that can become a wave. Our CD starts with a rag by Scott Joplin. Manifold riches follow. NYFOS Records will share more riches in upcoming releases—and perhaps a few rags as well.

Stay tuned.



# SONG LYRICS

## 1. Pineapple Rag

**Music by Scott Joplin: Lyrics by Joe Snyder**

**Performed by Stephanie Blythe, Steven Blier**

Hark to the music, it's the Pineapple Rag,  
That tune is certainly divine.  
Lordy, goodness how entrancing,  
Who on earth can keep from dancing?  
Right here is where we shine.  
Oh my, but isn't that a wonderful tune!  
It's by a gen'man friend of mine.  
Goodness me it's all the candy,  
Lord I hope they play that dandy  
Tune all the time.

Tease up to me, ease up to me, lovey,  
Squeeze up to me, freeze up to me, dovey,  
My goodness man, you never can lose me,  
Not when I hear that strain, Lordy don't believe it;  
Keep steppin' Bill, don't stop until I do.  
Stick to it, kid, you always did try to  
Set me a-reeling,  
Lord what a feeling,  
Oh, that Pineapple Rag.

Hear me sigh, hear me cry,  
For that Pineapple Rag.  
What a dream, it sure does seem  
Like Heaven when we drag.  
Soulful eyes, hypnotize,  
You are wonderful wise,  
You idolize me, so please surprise me  
By doing that Pineapple Rag.

Some people rave about Wagnerian airs,  
Some say the Spring Song is divine,  
Talk like that is out of season,  
What I like is something pleasin',

Pineapple Rag for mine.  
Say honey, listen how that band syncopates,  
Oh my, but isn't it sublime.  
Lordy, I could die a-dancing,  
If they'd play us that entrancing  
Tune all the time.

Cling to me, oh, sing to me, oh dearest,  
Don't hurry so, don't worry so, hearest  
That teasing rag, that squeezing rag, Lordy,  
How I do love that drag, it's so fascinating;  
Come, honey love, my money love, slide me;  
Come syncopate, don't hesitate, glide me.  
Say you're a daisy,  
I'm going crazy,  
For that Pineapple Rag.

Hear me sigh, hear me cry...

## **2. My Lady Frog**

**Music by Will Marion Cook: Lyrics by Will Accooe**

**Performed by William Burden, Steven Blier**

Where the waterlilies cluster 'neath drooping willows  
Where the moon so soft and tender peeps through the trees,  
Where the vines of brilliant luster find mossy pillows,  
Where the ferns so tall and slender sway with the breeze,  
There lived a lady frog, green polliwog was she—  
The lover, though, was one of brown.  
Throughout the whole night long a little song sang he,  
And whispered—for the moon was looking down.

My lady frog of opal hue  
Here on this log I sing to you.  
Bright as the flies that light this bog,  
So are your eyes, my lady frog.

As the lovers sat a-mating, from o'er the way  
Came a frog with chest-swelling, a bullfrog he.  
Told he of a palace waiting in grand array  
How the lady of his dwelling would be a queen.

And though 'tis sad to say he took away this maid.  
The frog of brown now croaks with pain,  
And when the night is still from o'er the hill 'tis said  
You hear in mournful tones the old refrain:

My lady frog...

### **3. Evening Song**

**Music by Charles Griffes: Lyrics by Sydney Lanier**

**Performed by William Burden, Steven Blier**

Look off, dear Love, across the sallow sands,  
And mark yon meeting of the sun and sea,  
How long they kiss in sight of all the lands.  
Ah! longer, longer, we.

Now in the sea's red vintage melts the sun,  
As Egypt's pearl dissolved in rosy wine,  
And Cleopatra night drinks all. 'Tis done,  
Love, lay thine hand in mine.

Come forth, sweet stars, and comfort heaven's heart;  
Glimmer, ye waves, round else unlighted sands.  
O night! divorce our sun and sky apart  
Never our lips, our hands.

### **4. Oh Gee! Oh Joy!**

**Music by George Gershwin: Lyrics by P.G. Wodehouse**

**Performed by The Company**

Oh gee oh joy!  
The bells are ringing!  
Because why?  
Because I am in love!  
Oh gee oh joy!  
The birds are singing!  
Because why?  
Because I am in love!

And all the while I seem  
In a dream

I never was so happy.  
Folks complain  
I'm insane  
Because I act so sappy.

Oh gee oh joy! The bells are ringing!  
Because why? Because I am in love!

Yea bo! But isn't love great!  
Gee whiz!  
Heigh-ho! I'm willing to state:  
It is!  
Don't know who the chap was  
Who first began it  
But it's the only thing on the planet.

Oh gee! Oh joy!...

## **5. Nickel Under Foot**

**Music and Lyrics by Marc Blitzstein**

**Performed by Stephanie Blythe, Steven Blier**

Maybe you wonder what it is  
Makes people good or bad  
Why some guy, an ace without a doubt  
Turns out to be a bastard,  
And the other way about.  
I'll tell you what I feel  
It's just the nickel under the heel.

Oh you can live like hearts and flowers  
And everyday is a wonderland tour.  
Oh you can dream and scheme  
And happily put and take, take and put—  
But first be sure  
That nickel's under your foot

Go stand on someone's neck while you take him  
Cut into somebody's throat as you put  
For every dream and scheme, depending on whether  
All through the storm



You've kept it warm  
That nickel under your foot

And if you're sweet then you'll grow rotten  
Your pretty heart covered over with soot  
And if for once you're gay and devil-may-care-less  
And oh so hot

I'll know you've got  
That nickel under your foot

## **6. Stay In My Arms**

**Music and lyrics by Marc Blitzstein**

**Performed by William Burden, Steven Blier**

In this great city  
Where will I find one peaceful, pretty  
Spot where noise is not?  
A bit of quiet,  
Untouched by all the hectic riot  
Would help things a lot.  
Our tempo's automatic,  
Science reveals.  
Our pace is acrobatic,  
Life moves on wheels  
Here's my admission:  
I haven't very much ambition  
For the mad existence of our time.

Let's just be old-fashioned,  
Let's just be lazy.  
The world's gone crazy  
So stay in my arms.  
My most dear, come close dear,  
Don't be afraid to.  
My hands were made to  
Shield you from alarms.

What's all the shooting for?  
Where are they rushing?  
Whom are they rooting for?

Whom are they crushing?  
Forget them, or let them  
Grow dim and hazy.  
The world's gone crazy  
So stay in my arms.

Let's lie here nearby here,  
'Mid field and daisy.  
The world's gone crazy  
So stay in my arms.  
While millions of millions  
Go wildly prancing,  
I'll be romancing  
A song of your charms.

They dance a dance that kills,  
Mad and defenseless.  
Such jumping Jacks and Jills—  
It's all so senseless.  
I love you. You love me.  
That much is plain, dear.  
The world's insane, dear,  
So stay in my arms.

## **7. Hit the Road**

**Music by Eubie Blake; Lyrics by Andy Razaf  
Performed by Stephanie Blythe, Steven Blier**

A dusky gent  
Quite pleasure-bent  
At last went home one day.  
But things were strange,  
There'd been a change  
While he was away.  
"Honey, please, unlock the door,"  
His words she heard him shout.  
Said she, "You don't live here no more—  
That 'honey' stuff is out!"

Hit the road you bumblebee,  
Since you crave variety

From now on you don't buzz around my door.  
Hit the road you bumblebee,  
On your way, don't bother me,  
Cause I ain't your queen bee any more.

No use begging pardon.  
I'm wise to your jive.  
Find some other garden—  
Use some other hive!

Get yourself another home  
Cause you've lost your honeycomb  
Hit the road you bum-bum-bumblebee.

I'd much prefer a beetle  
To an insect mean as you.  
Why, a low-down old mosquito  
Wouldn't do the things you do!

And compared to you a spider

Would be perfect company  
And still you've got the nerve  
To call yourself my honeybee!

No use begging pardon....

## **8. Nocturne**

**Music by Samuel Barber; Lyrics by Frederic Prokosch**

**Performed by William Burden, Steven Blier**

Close my darling both your eyes,  
Let your arms lie still at last.  
Calm the lake of falsehood lies  
And the wind of lust has passed,  
Waves across these hopeless sands  
Fill my heart and end my day,  
Underneath your moving hands  
All my aching flows away.

Even the human pyramids

Blaze with such a longing now:  
Close, my love, your trembling lids,  
Let the midnight heal your brow,  
Northward flames Orion's horn,  
Westward th' Egyptian light.  
None to watch us, none to warn  
But the blind eternal night.

### **9. Thousands of Miles**

**Music by Kurt Weill: Lyrics by Maxwell Anderson**

**Performed by Stephanie Blythe, Steven Blier**

How many miles to the heart of a child?  
Thousands of miles, thousands of miles.  
When he lay on your breast, he looked up and smiled  
Across tens of thousands, thousands of miles.

Each lives alone in a world of dark,  
Crossing the skies in a lonely arc,  
Save when love leaps out like a leaping spark  
Over thousands, thousands of miles.

Not miles, or walls, or length of days,  
Nor the cold doubt of midnight can hold us apart.  
For swifter than wings of the morning,  
The pathways of the heart.

How many miles to the heart of a son?  
Thousands of miles, thousands of miles.  
Farther off than the rails or the roadways run  
Across tens of thousands, thousands of miles.

The lines on the map stretch far and thin,  
To the streets and days that close him in,  
But then as of old he turns 'round to grin  
Over thousands, thousands of miles

Not miles or walls or length of days,  
Nor the cold doubt of midnight can hold us apart.  
For swifter than wings of the morning.  
The pathways of the heart  
Over tens of thousands of miles.



## 10. Wrong Note Rag

Music by Leonard Bernstein: Lyrics by Betty Comden & Adolph Green

Performed by The Company

Oh, there's a new sensation that is goin' aroun'  
Goin' aroun', goin' aroun', goin' aroun'  
A simple little ditty that is sweepin' the town  
Sweepin' the town, sweepin' the town

Doo doo doo—doo doo doo—  
They call it the Wrong Note Rag!

It's got a little twist that simply drives you insane  
Drives you insane, drives you insane, drives you insane  
Because you find you never get it out of your brain  
Out of your brain, out of your brain

Doo doo doo—doo doo doo—  
They call it the Wrong Note Rag!

Bunny hug! Turkey trot! Gimme the Wrong Note Rag!

Please play that lovely wrong note  
Because that wrong note  
Just makes me doo doo doo da doo doo doo da doo wah wah  
That note is such a strong note  
It makes me  
Ricky ricky tick ricky ricky tick tacky  
Wick wicky wick wick wicky wick wacky

Don't play that right polite note  
Because that right note  
Just makes me blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah  
No, no, give me that new and blue note  
And sister watch my dust, watch my smoke  
Doin' the Wrong Note Rag!

Doo doo doo—doo doo doo—  
They call it the Wrong Note Rag!

## **11. Take the Moment**

**from *Do I Hear a Waltz?***

**Music by Richard Rodgers; Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim**

**Performed by William Burden, Steven Blier**

Take the moment,  
Let it happen,  
Hug the moment,  
Make it last.  
Hold the feeling  
For the moment  
Or the moment  
Will have passed.  
All the noises  
Buzzing in your head,  
Warning you to wait,  
What for?  
Don't listen!  
Let it happen,  
Take the moment,  
Make the moment  
Many moments more!  
Make for us a thousand more!

## **12. 'Round Midnight**

**Music by Thelonious Monk; Lyrics by Bernie Hanighen (arr. Ricky Ian Gordon)**

**Performed by Stephanie Blythe, Steven Blier**

It begins to tell 'round midnight, midnight  
I do pretty well 'til after sundown  
Suppertime, I'm feelin' sad  
But it really gets bad 'round midnight

Memories always start 'round midnight  
Haven't got the heart to stand those memories  
When my heart is still with you  
And old midnight knows it, too

When a quarrel we had needs mending  
Does it mean that our love is ending  
Darling, I need you  
Lately I find  
You're out of my arms  
And I'm out of my mind

Let our hearts take wings 'round midnight, midnight  
Let the angels sing for your returning  
'Til our love is safe and sound  
And old midnight comes around

### **13. The Ballad of Booth**

**From *Assassins***

**Music and Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim**

**Performed by William Burden, Steven Blier**

Someone tell the story  
Someone sing the song  
Every now and then the country  
Goes a little wrong

Every now and then a madman's  
Bound to come along  
Doesn't stop the story—  
Story's pretty strong  
Doesn't change the song...

Johnny Booth was a handsome devil  
Got up in his rings and fancy silks  
Had him a temper but kept it level  
Everybody called him Wilkes

Why did you do it, Johnny?  
Nobody agrees  
You, who had everything  
What made you bring  
A nation to its knees?

Some say it was your voice had gone  
Some say it was booze  
They say you killed a country, John  
Because of bad reviews

Johnny lived with a grace and glitter  
Kinda like the lives he lived on stage  
Died in a barn, in pain and bitter  
Twenty-seven years of age

Why did you do it, Johnny?  
Throw it all away?  
Why did you do it, boy  
Not just destroy  
The pride and joy  
Of Illinois  
But all the U.S.A.?

Your brother made you jealous, John  
You couldn't fill his shoes  
Was that the reason, tell us, John—  
Along with bad reviews?

Johnny Booth was a headstrong fellow  
Even he believed the things he said  
Some called him noble, some said yellow  
What he was was off his head

How could you do it, Johnny  
Calling it a cause?  
You left a legacy  
Of butchery  
And treason we  
Took eagerly  
And thought you'd get applause

But traitors just get jeers and boos  
Not visits to their graves  
While Lincoln, who got mixed reviews  
Because of you, John, now gets only raves

Damn you, Johnny!  
You paved the way  
For other madmen  
To make us pay  
Lots of madmen  
Have had their say—  
But only for a day

Listen to the stories  
Hear it in the songs



Angry men don't write the rules  
And guns don't right the wrongs  
Hurts a while, but soon the country's  
Back where it belongs  
And that's the truth  
Still and all  
Damn you, Booth!

#### **14. Hosing the Furniture**

**Music and lyrics by Jonathan Larson**

**Performed by Stephanie Blythe, Steven Blier**

Hello my Lucite coffee table,  
Someone spill a little milk on you?  
Tsk, tsks, not to worry,  
Faucet (ugh ugh) faucet  
One more twist! That's better now  
"Rinse cycle" "lukewarm temper'ture"  
Here we go—What?  
"On"! Silly little me—  
I'm singing in the living room!  
What's the time?  
Fifteen minutes pour the bleach  
Put the finishing touches on the dinner  
The dog! The dog! The dog!  
Still outside!  
Silly little me—my nails!  
My god! A chip!  
Tom likes wonder bread with turkey  
Tom was preoccupied last night  
Is it me? Is it—  
Do I have enough milk? Oh, milk,  
Oh, stain, stain down the drain  
What a shine!  
I can see myself in the coffee table  
Pretty as I was on my wedding day  
I'm as pretty as the coffee table  
We're so pretty  
Boy: Mother?  
Mom: Ahh! What? You scared me.

Boy: Who were you talking to?  
Mom: Who? No one.  
Boy: What's all this?  
Mom: Why are you acting so weird?  
(You know)  
I'm hosing the furniture  
And when I hose I sing to myself

Hosing the furniture  
Who do you think cleans up, some elf?  
No sweeping, no mops, in no time  
It's "Whee!"  
When I'm hosing the furniture I'm free!  
And how are my vinyl drapes today?  
(Cough, cough) dirt!  
Tsk, tsck clean in a jiffy now,  
Nozzle (ugh ugh) nozzle  
"Fine mist spray" now we got it  
"Cellophane"? "Dacron"?  
No..."asbestos"? What...."vinyl"!  
Silly little me—  
Raindrops are falling on my couch!  
What's the time? Thirty minutes!  
Martinis, cut the flowers for the dinner!  
The dog! The dog! The dog!  
Hasn't been fed! Silly little me—  
My hair! My god!  
A grey hair (ouch)  
Tom likes cocktail onions  
Tom nodded off again last night  
Was it me? Was it?  
I get treated like dirt  
Oh, dirt, dirt here's a squirt!  
What a glow!  
I can see myself in the drapery  
Am I pretty as I was on my wedding day?  
Am I pretty as the drapery?  
Are we pretty?  
Boy: Mother!  
Mom: Ahhh! What? Don't do that!  
Boy: Dad just called on the phone.

Mom: Uh huh...

Boy: He'll be an hour or two.

Mom: Too bad.

Boy: Do you care?

Mom: Me? Oh no

I'm hosing the furniture

Do I look mad? My happiness grows!

Hosing the furniture

Who needs dad when I've got the hose!

More hours more showers, hosey and me,

When I'm hosing the furniture I'm free!

I'm free!

This house is a reflection of me

Modern, graceful, easy, simple, synthetic!

I'm free!

In ev'rything I see my reflection!

Do I really look so simply pathetic?

Silly little mister television set

Conquered by crumbs

Tsk, tsk no problem

Tangle (ugh, ugh) tangle

Knotted up there!

Hot steaming hot and go

What? Pull the trigger?

Silly little me

Soon it's gonna rain on the bookcase

What's the time?

A hundred twenty minutes

Dry turkey

Look relaxed for the dinner!

The dog! The dog! The dog!

The dog died last year! Silly little me—

My blouse! My god! A crumb!

Tom likes strawberry junket

Tom was talking in his sleep

Not to me, not to....

Can't he throw me a crumb?

Oh crumb, crumb down you scum  
What a life!  
I can see myself in my television  
I was pretty on my wedding day  
I was pretty as a television  
We were pretty – What now?

Boy: The drain backed up.  
Mom: Out!  
Boy: The kitchen's under water!  
Mom: Out!  
Boy: One more thing.  
Mom: Out!  
Boy: You've got crumbs on your back!  
Mom: Out!  
I'm hosing the furniture  
A minor flood never hurt anyone!  
Hosing the furniture  
Sometimes I wish this hose were a gun  
Just joking, see I'm laughing  
Silly little me!  
When I'm hosing the furniture, I'm free!

### **15. New York Lights**

**Music by William Bolcom: Lyrics by Arnold Weinstein & Arthur Miller**  
**Performed by William Burden, Steven Blier**

I love the beauty of the view at home,  
The palazzos of Palermo, the cathedral dome;  
I've seen pictures of Milano and of Rome,  
But they don't compare to the New York lights.

I love our oranges right off the tree,  
And frying sardines just fished from the sea,  
But there's only one place that I long to be  
And that's New York, and the New York lights.

In Sicily every town has a fountain  
Where the whole town meets,  
And under our volcano mountain  
Couples hold hands, nicely, in the streets.

I've seen our sea and seen our sights,  
Our big hotel on our hilltop heights  
But since I was a boy I been dreaming of nights  
In New York, and the New York lights.

New York is always my dream!  
A shiny dream from afar  
Where the bright lights are,  
Those New York lights.

#### **16. Walt Whitman in 1989**

**Music by Chris de Blasio; Lyrics by Perry Brass  
Performed by William Burden, Steven Blier**

Walt Whitman has come down  
today to the hospital room;  
he rocks back and forth in the crisis;

he says it's good we haven't lost  
our closeness, and cries  
as each one is taken

He has written many lines  
about these years: the disfigurement  
of young men and the wars

of hard tongues and closed minds.  
The body in pain will bear such nobility,  
but words have the edge

of poison when spoken bitterly.  
Now he takes a dying man  
in his arms and tells him

how deeply flows the River  
that takes the old man and his friends  
this evening. It is the River

of dusk and lamentation.  
"Flow." Walt says. "dear River,  
I will carry this young man

to your bank. I'll put him myself  
on one of your strong, flat boats,  
and we'll sail together all the way  
through evening."

### **17. How Can I Keep From Singing**

**Music by Robert Wadsworth Lowry; Lyrics by Pete Seeger (arr. David Krane)**

**Performed by The Company**

My life flows on in endless song;  
Above earth's lamentation,  
I hear the real, though far-off hymn  
That hails a new creation;  
Above the tumult and the strife  
I hear its music ringing;  
It sounds an echo in my soul—  
How can I keep from singing?

What though the tempest loudly roars,  
I hear the truth, it liveth;  
What though the darkness round me close?  
Songs in the night it giveth.  
No storm can shake my inmost calm  
While to that rock I'm clinging;  
Since Love is Lord of heaven and earth,  
How can I keep from singing?

When tyrants tremble, sick with fear,  
And hear their death-knell ringing,  
When friends rejoice both far and near,  
How can I keep from singing?  
In prison cell and dungeon vile,  
Our thoughts to them go winging;  
When friends by shame are undefiled,  
How can I keep from singing?

My life flows on in endless song;  
Above earth's lamentation,  
I hear the sweet, though far-off hymn  
That hails a new creation;  
Above the tumult and the strife  
I hear its music ringing;  
It sounds an echo in my soul—  
How can I keep from singing?